



AGGRESSION BETWEEN CATS IN THE SAME HOUSEHOLD

It is impossible to estimate how well any particular pair or group of cats will ultimately tolerate each other. Some cats are territorial, may never adjust to sharing their house, and may do best in a one-cat family. However, many problems between cats can be successfully resolved. To do this, you may need help, both from your veterinarian and from an animal behavior specialist who is knowledgeable in cat behavior. Cats with aggression concerns may never be best friends, but can often learn to mutually tolerate each other with a minimum of conflict. **Working with aggression problems between family cats will take time and commitment from you. Do not give up without consulting the appropriate experts.**



Common Types of Aggressive Behaviors between Cats

Territorial Aggression:

Cats are territorial. Territorial aggression occurs when a cat feels that an intruder has invaded his territory. Depending on where your cat spends his time, he may view your whole neighborhood as his territory. Female cats can be just as territorial as males. The behavior patterns in this type of aggression include chasing and ambushing the intruder, as well as hissing and swatting when contact occurs. Territorial problems often occur when a new cat is brought into a household, when a young kitten reaches maturity, or when a cat encounters neighborhood cats outside. It is not uncommon for a cat to be territorially aggressive toward one cat in a family, and friendly and tolerant to another.



Inter-male Aggression:

Adult male cats normally tend to threaten, and sometimes fight with, other males. These behaviors can occur as sexual challenges over a female, or to achieve a relatively high position in the cats' loosely organized social dominance hierarchy. This type of aggression involves much ritualized body posturing, stalking, staring, yowling and howling.

Attacks are usually avoided if one cat "backs down" and walks away. If an attack occurs, the attacker will usually jump forward, directing a bite to the nape of the neck, while the opponent falls to the ground on his back and attempts to bite and scratch the attacker's belly with his hind legs. The cats may roll around biting and screaming, suddenly stop, resume posturing, fight again or walk away. Cats do not usually severely injure one another this way, but you should always check for puncture wounds, which are prone to infection. Intact males are much more likely to fight in this way than are neutered males.

Defensive Aggression:

Defensive aggression occurs when a cat is attempting to protect himself from a threat he believes he cannot escape from. This can occur in response to punishment or the threat of punishment from a person, an attack or attempted attack from another cat, or any time he feels threatened or afraid. Defensive postures include crouching with the legs pulled in under the body, laying the ears back, tucking the tail, and possibly rolling slightly to the side. This is not the same as the submissive postures dogs. Continuing to approach a cat that is in this posture is likely to precipitate an attack.

Redirected Aggression:

This type of aggression is directed toward another animal that did not initially provoke the behavior. For example, a household cat sitting in the window may see an outdoor cat walk across the front yard. Because he cannot attack the outdoor cat, he may instead turn and attack the other family cat that is sitting next to him in the window. Redirected aggression can be either offensive or defensive in nature.



What You Can Do

If your cat's behavior changes suddenly, your first step should always be to contact your veterinarian for a thorough health examination. Cats often hide symptoms of illness until they are seriously ill. Any change in behavior may be an early indication of a medical problem. Spay or neuter any intact pets in your home. The behavior of one intact animal can affect all of your pets.

Start the slow introduction process over from the beginning. You may need professional help from an animal behavior specialist to successfully implement these techniques.

In extreme cases, consult with your veterinarian while you are working with them on a behavior modification program. Your veterinarian is the only person who is licensed and qualified to

prescribe any medication for your cats. Do not attempt to give your cat any over-the-counter or prescription medication without consulting with your veterinarian.



What Not To Do

If your cats are fighting, do not allow the fights to continue. They will not be able to "work things out" on their own. The more often cats fight, the worse the problem will become. To stop a fight in progress, make a loud noise, such as blowing a whistle, squirting the cats with water, or throwing something soft over them. Do not try to pull them apart. **Prevent future fights.** This may mean keeping the cats totally separated from each other while you are working on the problem, or at least preventing contact between them in situations likely to trigger a fight.

Do not try to punish the cats involved. Punishment is likely to elicit further aggression and fearful responses, which will only make the problem worse. If you attempt punishment, you may become a target for redirected and defensive aggression.

Some cats are relatively tolerant of sharing their house and territory with multiple cats. It is not uncommon for a cat to tolerate some cats, but not get along with others in the house. However, the more cats sharing the same territory, the more likely it is that some of your cats will begin fighting with each other.



When you introduce cats to each other, one of them may send "play" signals, which can be misinterpreted by the other cat. If those signals are interpreted as aggression by one of the

cats, then you should handle the situation as "aggressive." The factors that determine how well cats will get along together are not fully understood. Every cat is different and every household is different. Cats that are well socialized (they had pleasant experiences with other cats during kitten hood) will likely be more sociable than those that have not been around many other cats. On the other hand, "street cats" that are in the habit of fighting with other cats in order to defend their territory and food resources, may not do well in a multi-cat household.

Genetic factors also influence a cat's temperament, so friendly parents are probably more likely to produce friendly offspring.

For more information or additional support, please contact the behavior department at (856) 424-2288 ext. 114 or behavior@awanj.org.

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